

**Twinning Workshop
Evangelical Lutheran Church In Malawi**

And

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin - ELCA.

Chetek Lutheran- Chetek Feb 16, 2002.

brief presentation by: Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe.

Background:

My family and I are the first official guest of the Northwest Synod and its congregations. We are very grateful to God for such an opportunity and are very thankful to all those that worked very hard to get us here for our sabbatical leave. Notable, we would like to specifically mention Bishop Berg, Rev. J.M. Magelssen, Rev. Harold Oelschlager, Camp Wapogasset and its Director Loren. As you will recall, we came to this country in October of 2000 and are due to return back home in June. The first part of our sabbatical was spend one year at Camp Wapo helping and working as an international resource person. We took advantage of such an office to respond to a variety of invitations which come from congregations and the ELCA to introduce ourselves as a new companion of the Northwest Synod. It was hard work undertaken with great joy knowing that this was the only way by which people would come to know our church and country as well as the challenges we were facing. We are very grateful to all who invited us to share news of our country with them. We have been deeply moved by the love and interest congregations have shown. Not only have their generosity been clearly demonstrated in the way they have supported the work and the needs there, but also by deciding to have permanent sister relationship with some of the parishes. This is very positive, because as you will have noted, the ELCM was born out of lay

movement and not missionary efforts also otherwise known as home/parent churches in Europe or the USA. It had to invite sisters and brothers to be partners with it in mission. It was in this way that some mission agencies in Europe came to support the work of ELCM and continue to do so now. This effort continued until now, its good that have you in the NW Synod can join this partnership, please do know that you are not alone, They are many more old and new partners in mission with the ELCM. We have mission partners in Germany, Finland and Sweden. These are traditional partners supporting the ELCM running budget on annual basis.

Then we have friends of ELCM. They do not have financial obligations, but are taken seriously as anybody else. These are mostly churches and congregations in the region and overseas. Most of these were involved right from the beginning resulting from some of the contact ELCM had. Because of its history ELCM has a lot to gain from these relationships just as it has a lot to give to it. There is still a lot to be done and many more partners in every form are invited. It is for this reason that we are happy to be here as part of consolidating our relationship. Once completed, the twinning process will help our congregations to come to know each other and undertake their journey together in the 21st Century. Visits shall be the crucial part of the journey in order to see each others context. We hope and trust that this will in turn enrich both of our churches to be thankful for each other and to thank God for our companionship relation and what it enables us to see in each other enriching our witness and spiritually growing together. As a growing church, we have a lot of expectations for our companion relationship. ELCM is on record as one of the fastest growing church in Africa along with other fast growing Lutheran Churches in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Madagascar. Yet it faces serious obstacles of poverty and diseases. The profile reveals the difficult context in which ELCM finds itself and witnesses. HIV/AIDS is on the rise and kills more adults than any other disease. On the other hand malaria still takes the lives of many children under five years. Still more

this year the country has experienced serious food shortages due to flooding last year. As we gather here today people in our country are dying of hunger. Floods have also been reported this year which means the problems are far from resolving. These are serious challenges and yet opportunities for our partners to journey with us and discover faith in difficult times. We are therefore happy as your congregations commit themselves to these partnerships to journey with us. May God bless us as we begin the journey together so that we may continue to walk together in the 21 st Century.

Our Set Up. How it all begins.

The ELCM.

The Preaching Point: Served by lay people, mostly youth and women is established, nurtured, and visited by nearby congregational leaders in most cases evangelists who preach the word of God witnessing its growth into a full established congregation. Most of the congregations have a preaching point under them. (The worship is often in temporary buildings or under trees). Here is where it all begins and can grow into a congregation.

The Congregation: Served by lay people mostly women and youths under the leadership of an evangelist and church elders who devote more time to its work. Here the pastor will visit regularly for sacraments (at least one visit in six weeks) is required. The congregation is a place of church growth through bible study and Christian witness. (less than one fourth of these congregations have a permanent place of worship). The evangelists and parish workers use bicycles for their traveling around the congregation. It is here where we build village chapels and assist with bicycles.

The Parish in Preparation: served by an assistant parish pastor is an area growing into a parish. These areas are reviewed every two years

and usually received by the church assembly into full parishes. Their set up is similar to those of the parish. In other words these are parishes in making. The assistant parish pastor is supervised by the parish pastor.

The Parish: A center of common church work within a specific geographical area under the parish pastor who is supported by the assistant parish pastor, parish worker and evangelist. The parish pastor and the assistant are often on full-time basis while most of the evangelists and parish workers serve the church on voluntary basis. ELCM has thirty of these. It is here where the life and ministry of ELCM can be experienced. A lot of what makes the church takes place here. It is here where town chapels are needed so that they can provide a home to the parish also known as parish center. So far only one-fourth of the parish centers have parish centers. The same is true of transportation. It is here that motorcycles are required to help the pastors to travel around. A parish normally has between nine to twelve congregations, A vehicle would even be more appropriate, but being aware of our limited resources a motorcycle does the work. Again only less than one-fourth of our parishes have a motorcycle. It is here at this level where the twinning has been made in ELCM.

The Central Office: (head office) also known here as church wide offices or office of the Bishop. It is here where the church is coordinated under the supervision of the Bishop. The Bishop has one assistant also known as the Dean of the Cathedral in Lilongwe. Other officers are:

The Treasurer (heading the finances)

The Administrative secretary (administration dept.)

The Principal (lay training dept.)

Youth and Sunday school coordinator.

Women's coordinator

The building supervisor (buildings)

Small Project Stores/Section
Security officer - security services.

It is here that the bishop and other officers operate from and regularly visit the parishes throughout the country. A 4x4 land cruiser is the greatest need here to help the Bishop in his travels. The bishops visits are a source of great encouragement to pastors who serve in what are often difficult isolated areas and have to witness in difficult situations. The parishioners eagerly await the bishops visits each year. Choirs (youth and women) are participants to the visits which are the central part to Evangelism and church growth. The head office is in a separate building from the Lilongwe parish. The whole property is also known as the Lutheran Church Center.

Church Institutions

1. Lutheran Girls Secondary School at Bwengu.

The school is a boarding school run by the ELCM in conjunction with the Malawi Government (ministry of education). The church ran the institution with the local community, while the government employs and pays the teaches. The school also helps a limited number of boys in the area as a way of helping the local community with the educational needs.

2. Primary Schools:

A total of seven primary schools for both girls and boys are ran by ELCM also jointly with government throughout the country. Only two of the seven schools have permanent buildings. Just like with the churches, the community has bricks, but needs financial help to build permanent school blocks and teachers' houses.

3 Adult literacy Education Center:

For mostly adult women who cannot read or write are run by the ELCM in almost all its congregations which have permanent buildings.

It is also here where the feeding centers for orphans as well as their early education is provided. The church provides the learning centers (church buildings) while the community provides the teachers.

4. Evangelical Lutheran Development Program (ELDP):

Is a joint program run by ELCM in corporation with the LWF - World Service Department in Geneva. It carries out major development work on behalf of the ELCM. This institution is now in transition to become the development department of ELCM from Jan 2003. Most of development, relief rehabilitation work is undertaken for ELCM by ELDP. After transition it will also serve as the diaconic section of the church. So far ELDP has had a good record of emergency response and preparedness.

Dear Friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Synod Office and all congregations that have responded in supporting the needs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, especially for the growing needs of orphans.

Kindly please convey my appreciation from those in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi.

Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe